

FOODFOR^{THOUGHT}

LATE FALL/EARLY WINTER 2025

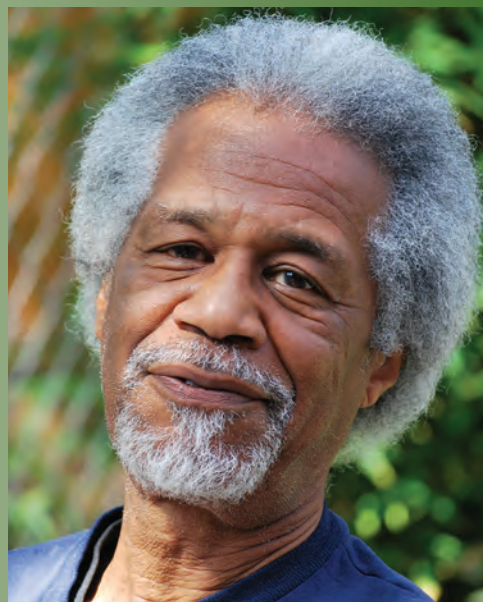


MEET BRIANNA

Even with two young children of her own, Brianna recently has taken in two additional children who needed both stability and safety. Brianna, who just turned 30 years old and works a full-time job, shared that folding these ‘bonus kids’ into her family has been “rewarding to the heart, but a bit challenging financially.” Brianna continued to say that this was the first time she had ever reached out for any type of assistance. “Thank you so much for your help! This has been such a heavy stress to carry, and I often allow pride to stop me from asking for help,” Brianna shared.

MEET PERCY

Percy drove up to KLF, greeting our staff with a big smile. “I hate to bother you, but I am hoping you have some fresh fruit. That’s all I need — I don’t want to take something other people can use. I’ve got some other food I can eat, but I just can’t afford produce right now.” Percy, an 83-year-old Armed Forces Veteran, continued to share that he was “somewhat homeless at the moment.” For nearly 10 years, Percy lived in a rental home owned by a local landlord. Earlier this year, the property was sold to an out-of-state management company, who immediately doubled the rent. This became unaffordable and Percy had to move out shortly after. “I have an application in at one of those subsidized senior apartment buildings, but you know how it takes time to get those things processed.” He looks out the window and says more quietly, “I will sure miss my backyard. But I can adjust.” Percy shares that he is trying to save money to secure his new place, and visiting KLF is helpful. “Once I get settled, you won’t have to put up with me stopping by anymore.”



MEET AIDEN

Through its Weekend Food Pack Program, KLF provides over 1,600 food packs to students in 26 schools in Kalamazoo, Portage, Comstock, Climax-Scotts, and Parchment Public Schools. We work closely with our partners in the schools to distribute the packs to students who need them most. A teacher from a local elementary school reached out to share this story. “Aiden is a quiet student and rarely smiles,” the teacher shared. “But I tell you, he looked into his pack and got the biggest grin on his face.” She continued to say that, when Aiden got his Weekend Food Pack, he started to do a little dance. “I got noodles! I got noodles!” Aiden grinned and said, “I love noodles.” His teacher rarely sees Aiden this happy or animated.

While the client stories featured above are true, their names and images have been changed for anonymity.

A NOTE FROM JEN

For this newsletter, we sat down with our **Volunteer Coordinator, Jillian Bryant**, to learn about current volunteer needs and how to get started if you are interested in volunteering. Jillian has been with KLF for five years and has a strong understanding of what each volunteer role entails and how to make the experience beneficial for all.

— Jennifer Johnson, Executive Director



Q: Volunteers are a critical part of KLF's mission. What makes volunteering here unique?

A: Volunteers are involved in every aspect and at every level of our organization. From our front desk, pantries, food distributions and home deliveries to warehouse support and mailings. Volunteers work alongside staff to serve our community and help further our mission. Volunteers truly are the backbone of KLF. When you look at our staff-to-volunteer ratio, volunteers far outnumber paid staff. We couldn't do what we do without the extra hands.



Q: What are some of the biggest volunteer needs KLF has right now?

A: We have many opportunities and needs for both groups and individuals. However, groups tend to be easier to secure than individuals. Right now, our biggest need is for individual volunteers to get involved on a more regular basis in our service department, including pantries, Call Center, and home deliveries. Many people think volunteering must be a weekly commitment, but that's not the case! We offer flexible options, so you can pick up shifts as your schedule allows rather than committing to a set schedule. This allows you to volunteer at times that work best, while still helping out on a frequent basis.

Q: KLF offers a mix of individual and group opportunities. How do these roles work together to support KLF's mission?

A: Volunteer groups usually help in the warehouse by packing food boxes, repacking produce, and sorting donations. These large projects are perfect for teams of 3-12 people and help us complete essential tasks that staff alone could not manage. Volunteering in a group is a great team-building activity and provides an introduction to KLF and its operation. Group opportunities are popular, and the calendar typically books out about 2-3 months in advance. Individual volunteers support the service delivery side, helping provide direct service to clients and the public. With flexible scheduling options, it's easy to get involved; we have morning, afternoon, and even some evening opportunities available. For safety, we require volunteers to be 16 or older to volunteer on their own; 12-15 years old accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Q: For someone who wants to get more involved, what's the best way to start volunteering with KLF?

A: The first step is to reach out directly to me at jillian@kzoolf.org or **269-488-2617 x209**. We'll discuss the type of volunteering that interests you, availability, and desired commitment level to figure out what's going to be the best fit. I like to bring interested volunteers in for a tour of the facility so you can see the different roles in action and learn more about our programs. After the tour, we'll talk through next steps and how to schedule your first shift. I'm always happy to answer any questions and help you get started!

2025 Community Celebration



Willie Webster Outstanding Volunteer Award: Annette Kushner



Marcia Jackson Hunger Advocacy Award: Family Health Center



Community Pillar Award: Lewis C. Howard, Inc.



Anne Wend Lipsey Food Justice Award: Pride of Scotts



Golden Loaf Individual Award: Steve Perez



Golden Loaf Group Award: Trinity Lutheran Church Food Pantry



Food Industry Supply Hero (FISH) Award: Kalamazoo County Farm Bureau

On September 25th, KLF held its Annual Community Celebration at WMU's Fetzer Center.

We've come to love this annual event which allows us to spend time with our volunteers, community partners, and donors, sharing our gratitude and thanks for all they do to make our work possible. One element of our Community Celebration is the presentation of volunteer and community awards, some of which have been in existence since KLF was founded.

This year's award winners include the community members photographed above and more.

Many thanks to First National Bank of Michigan for sponsoring this important event. Photo credits to David Barrett.



The Perfect Holiday Gift

Trying to come up with a unique gift for the person who has everything? Give a donation to Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes in their honor!

We will send a decorative card acknowledging your gift, sharing any special message you wish to pass along. If you prefer, you can pick up the acknowledgement cards to send in a holiday mailing or stuff in a stocking.

Missing a departed loved one this holiday season? You can also give in memory of someone special. Visit kzoelf.org to donate and follow the prompts to give a gift in honor or in memory of someone!



Looking for a fun and educational activity to do with the young people in your life? Conduct a **26-item food drive** that reinforces reading, creativity, and giving back to the community. Start a new tradition and collect the items below for KLF during the holiday season!

Applesauce Pouches
Baking Mixes
Canned Meats
Dried Fruit
Easy-to-Open, Pop-Top Items
Fruit, Canned
Gluten-Free Items
Hamburger Helper or Similar Meal Kits
Infant Formula
Juice Boxes
Kid-Friendly Snacks
Low-Sodium Items
Mashed Potatoes, Instant
Nutri-Grain Bars or Any Cereal Bars
Oatmeal Packets
Protein Shakes
Quick, Microwavable Meals
Rice
Soups and Stews
Tortillas, Shelf-Stable
Utensils Packs, Plastic
Vegetable, Beef, or Chicken Broth
Walnuts or Other Nuts
Xtra Yummy Cereal of Your Choice!
Yams, Canned
Ziti, Penne, or Any Pasta



As we are preparing to send this newsletter to print, KLF is navigating an unprecedented challenge facing our friends and neighbors. For the first time in the history of the program, benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have been paused and were not distributed to the individuals and families who rely on them. SNAP is an essential element to the social safety network, providing families with nutrition and boosting local economies through grocery store sales. **Since the announcement was made in October, KLF has experienced a 40% increase in demand for service and quickly surpassed our food budget to ensure adequate inventory.** While we don't know what the next few weeks will hold, we do know one thing. We live in a generous community that steps up in times of need. The outpouring of support we've received and continue to receive has energized our team to face this challenge head-on and to work, in partnership, with our community to alleviate hunger.

Quite simply, thank you.



Interested in hosting a drive to benefit KLF?

Check out our **Food + Fund Drive Checklist** on our website! You'll find tips for organizing your drive, printable flyers, wish lists, and more.

Anyone is welcome to collect donations in boxes, bags, and totes. If you can deliver your donations to us, that is always helpful and appreciated!

Thank you!



TRIBUTES

Generous donations made to KLF in someone's **HONOR** or **MEMORY**. Donations made 8/1/2025 to 9/30/2025.

IN HONOR

Jim & Jean Bylsma
Sarah Greene

Laura K. Eiler
Ben Eiler

Cheryl Fuller
Ms. Elizabeth G. Roelofs

Jeanne Hartenstein
Jim & Joanna McIntyre

Jesus Christ
Matthew Chumas

Kalamazoo Civil War Round Table
Roxanne & James Frey

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Amy Williams

IN MEMORY

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Kathleen & Bruce Houtman
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Hazel Kirkendall
Marcia Groenheide

Marguerite Kolb
Grant Kolb

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Bill & Ellen Kozar

Andy Kristen
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Howard & Carol Steiner

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Lori Klutts

Linda Renauld Lutz
Robert R. Renauld, Sr.

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Mr. James A. Magnan

Chris Magnan Poliski
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Beth McLaren
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Promoting a Hunger-Free Community Since 1982

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Our Mission

Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes will feed hungry people and engage our community in the fight to end hunger.

Our Values

Respect
Diversity & Inclusion
Stewardship & Accountability
Integrity
Collaboration
Urgency
Service

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.



HELP US KEEP OUR SHELVES FULL!

Hunger is urgent and constant. On average, 850 people receive food from Loaves & Fishes every day. The shelves empty as soon as we can fill them. But you can help feed those in need. With just \$1, Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes can provide enough food for 3 meals. Donate online or by mail today!



Give on our website via credit card or PayPal



Give via Venmo

KALAMAZOO LOAVES AND FISHES
901 Portage St. Kalamazoo, MI 49001

LATE FALL/EARLY WINTER 2025

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269.488.2617

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Jillian Bryant, Volunteer Coordinator
TBD, Program & Delivery Assistant
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Jennifer Johnson, Executive Director
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